

E-mail scam alert

January 9, 2015

An e-mail scam that uses fictitious court summonses has become active again.

The Office of the Clerk of the Mississippi Supreme Court and Court of Appeals received numerous inquiries about e-mails which falsely claim to have come from a court.

The suspicious e-mails claim to be a notice to attend a court proceeding, although the e-mail recipient is not involved in any litigation. These e-mails were not sent by the Court of Appeals or any entity associated with the Mississippi Judiciary. Persons who are not involved in litigation would not receive such e-mail from the Mississippi appellate courts.

E-mail users are advised to be cautious of links in electronic correspondence received from unknown sources. Spammers may create sender addresses that mimic government agency addresses.

The scam e-mails are a ruse intended to persuade recipients to open a link.

Mississippi Supreme Court Director of Information Technology Daryl L. Wingo said, "The spammer's goal in sending these e-mails is for the victim to click the 'can be found here' link so that they can collect sensitive information from the victim, remotely install malware on the victim's computer, or both."

Supreme Court Deputy Court Administrator Rob Nations said the court has received numerous inquiries from attorneys and trial court staff regarding phony notices of oral argument or for show-cause hearings. The phony notices list a fictitious court agent.

One notice read, "Notice of appearance You are hereby notified that you are required to attend the Mississippi Court of Appeals in January 28, 2015 as a defendant for the hearing of a pirated software case. Compulsory attendance. You may have the services of a lawyer, if necessary. Failure to appear may result in the imposition of sanctions. More detailed information regarding the case can be found here."

Opening the "can be found here" link may expose the user's computer to malware or allow the spammer to collect sensitive information. Persons who have no involvement in litigation pending before the courts are warned not to open a link or attachment in unsolicited e-mail fitting this description.

The recent recurrence of spam disguised as court correspondence is a variation of a scam that circulated a year ago. In that earlier scam, fraudulent e-mails stated that the recipient's complaint had been received by the court, and attempted to get the recipient to open a link or an attached document. Recipients of those e-mails had not filed anything with the courts.

Courts in other states have reported similar e-mail scams, including some which tell the recipient to send money. One such scam references nonexistent arrest warrants.

If in doubt about the authenticity of correspondence, independently look up a telephone number and call the entity named in the e-mail.

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